

# First record of Forest Swallow *Petrochelidon fuliginosa* for Angola

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**Andorinha-da-floresta *Petrochelidon fuliginosa*, uma nova espécie para Angola.** A 22 de setembro de 2014 várias andorinhas totalmente escuras foram observadas numa área de floresta tropical (600 m de altitude) associada com a escarpa norte de Angola, na província do Uíge. Com base na sua rápida actividade de voo, chamamento semelhante ao das andorinhas-rupestres, garganta ruiva e cauda ligeiramente bifurcada sem marcas brancas, foram identificadas como andorinhas-da-floresta *Petrochelidon fuliginosa*. A observação constitui o primeiro registo para Angola e estende a área de distribuição conhecida por pelo menos 700 km para sul desde o centro do Gabão.

**Summary.** On 22 September 2014, several all-dark swallows were observed in an area of lowland forest (600 m altitude) on the northern Angolan escarpment in Uíge province. Based on their rapid flight, cliff swallow-like calls, russet throats and tails lacking any white markings, they were identified as Forest Swallows *Petrochelidon fuliginosa*. These observations constitute the first record for Angola and extend the known range south from central Gabon by at least 700 km.

On 22 September 2014, we were observing birds c.30 km north-west of Quitexe (07°57'S 15°02'E) in Uíge province, Angola, together with J. Francis and R. Rowland. We were in an area of relatively intact lowland rainforest (600 m altitude) on the northern Angolan escarpment, which had been selectively logged during the past two years. Along an access road, we noted several small, dark swallows. On a previous visit to the site MSLM (unpubl.) had recorded Square-tailed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne nitens*, a considerable extension of its known range: the species had previously been recorded only from the enclave of Cabinda and further north (Traylor 1963, Dean 2000). As we had observed Square-tailed Saw-wing again near Uíge town the previous day, we initially assumed the dark swallows to be this species. However, their wingbeats were very rapid as they darted between the crowns of the tallest trees, so their flight was quite unlike the usually slow and 'casual' action of a saw-wing *Psalidoprocne* sp. A group of c.20 Square-tailed Saw-wings flew overhead while we were watching the birds and the contrast was immediately apparent.

Closer inspection revealed that there were c.6 birds, all flying in a similar fashion. They called occasionally, making the typical 'chippy' calls of a cliff swallow *Petrochelidon* sp., unlike the calls we have heard from any saw-wing. We observed them for c.15 minutes, during which time one perched briefly on a bare branch in the upper canopy. Unfortunately, the light conditions were

poor (and the bird was silhouetted against a pale, overcast sky), but through the telescope we could see that the throat was clearly paler than the rest of the plumage, which was uniform blackish brown.

Approximately one hour later, c.200 m from the forest edge and c.500 m from where we made our initial observations, we located a colony of several hundred Red-throated Cliff Swallows *Petrochelidon rufigula* around their nests under a bridge and on some disused buildings. We noticed the small, dark swallows among them. They were hard to pick out from the far more numerous Red-throated Cliff Swallows, as their flight actions appeared identical.

In the late morning, we again encountered two all-dark swallows, flying low along the vehicle track in front of us and feeding over an adjacent clearing. We observed them for c.5 minutes under excellent conditions, around and sometimes below eye level, and at close range (<5–20 m) as they foraged along the track. On several occasions, when they flew directly towards us and banked, we could quite clearly observe that one bird had a strong russet/chestnut throat, whilst the other had the throat slightly buffier. When they banked, they spread their tails, permitting us to verify our earlier impression that they completely lacked white markings, thereby eliminating Rock Martin *Ptyonoprocne fuligula*.

Distinguishing Forest Swallow *Petrochelidon fuliginosa* from Square-tailed Saw-wing can be challenging, but based on a combination of

features (flight action, vocalisations and plumage coloration), all consistent with Forest Swallow (Keith *et al.* 1992, Sinclair & Ryan 2003, Borrow & Demey 2014), we present this as the first record of the latter species for Angola. They had (i) very rapid wingbeats and a quick flight action, quite unlike the slower and more 'casual' flight of Square-tailed Saw-wing; (ii) 'chippy' calls like those of a cliff swallow; and (iii) chestnut-coloured throats, compared to the usually greyish-buff coloration of Square-tailed Saw-wing.

Because we had observed breeding activity by hirundines throughout Angola during the previous two weeks, including very obviously by Red-throated Cliff Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows *Cecropis abyssinica* at the same locality, it is possible that the Forest Swallows were also breeding in the area. The species is known to nest in buildings or in verandahs (Chapin 1948) and we observed the birds flying close to an abandoned building several times, once apparently entering it. We were unable to locate a nest, but it is possible that the birds were breeding among the other swallows, although it should be noted that they normally breed solitarily (Turner & Rose 1989, Keith *et al.* 1992).

Forest Swallow is a resident and local migrant in tropical forests from eastern Nigeria to central Gabon (Turner & Rose 1989, Keith *et al.* 1992, Brosset & Énard 1986). The nearest records appear to come from at least 700 km to the north. However, the northern Angolan escarpment forests represent a known outlier of the Congo Basin forests and have been poorly explored, so the discovery of additional Congolese forest species here is unsurprising. The same site has already yielded one new species for Angola, Yellow-throated Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx flavigularis* (Mills *et al.* 2013), as well as providing extensions to the known ranges of Sabine's Spinetail *Rhaphidura sabini* and Square-tailed Saw-wing (MSLM unpubl.).

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